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Author(s): Nicolas Oikonomidès

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SILK TRADE AND PRODUCTION IN BYZANTIUM FROM THE SIXTH TO THE NINTH CENTURY: THE SEALS OF KOMMERKIARIOI

NICOLAS OIKONOMIDÈS

The silk trade in late antiquity has always been seen by modern historians as if surrounded by a romantic aura. The trip to China was long, dangerous, and expensive since the Persians imposed increasingly heavy taxes upon those who crossed their territory—not to speak of the special difficulties that arose when Persia and the Roman Empire were at war. In Emperor Justinian's time (527–65) Byzantium tried desperately to establish direct contacts with China through the route of the Russian steppes, starting from the Crimea; but these attempts never resulted in any sizable success. Persia and its merchants as intermediaries thus remained a decisive factor for the sixth-century silk trade, especially when it had been decreed that Byzantine merchants were not allowed to trade beyond the empire's eastern frontier.¹

Yet Byzantium remained the only potential customer for silk west of Persia: hence its repeated attempts to bring prices down by establishing direct state control over the buying of silk. In the fourth century we hear of an official, the *comes commerciorum*, that is, the head of the market towns (*commercia*) along the frontier; beyond his presumed general supervision over foreign trade, he

was the only person in the empire authorized to buy silk from foreign merchants. It is clear that this official's bargaining power was considerable since, in theory at least, he could refuse to make any purchase if he judged that the prices asked by the Persians were too high. Moreover, it can be surmised that his personal income did not depend on the silk trade. But demand for silk in Byzantium was very strong, and merchants as well as their customers were ready to pay almost any price for this luxury product which was also an important indicator of social status. Consequently I would imagine the *comes commerciorum* as a public official trying to impose, for the state's benefit, moderate prices on silk.²

This would be the clearest case of state intervention in the economic process. It was not the only one. At the same time legislation was introduced forbidding ordinary citizens to wear high-quality silk, especially purple silk, which was thus becoming an item reserved for the emperor, his family, and their entourage.³ But these restrictions were only partly respected, so that new legislation and new policing became necessary: Justinian tried to fix mandatory low prices for silk garments inside the empire, with the hope that this would discourage illegal imports of silk and result in a boycott that would hurt the Persian economy. His measure

¹See G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (Oxford, 1956), 68–69 and note 1 (bibliography). The basic study for Byzantine silk remains the one by R. S. Lopez, "Silk Industry and Trade in the Byzantine Empire," *Speculum* 20 (1945), 1–42 (hereafter Lopez, "Silk"). Important contributions concerning Roman (and late Roman-early Byzantine) trade with China, including trade in silk, are to be found in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. Hildergard Temporini and W. Haase, II, *Prinzipat*, 9,2 (Berlin-New York, 1978): J. Ferguson, M. Keynes, "China and Rome" (pp. 581–603); M. G. Raschke, "New Studies in Roman Commerce with the East" (pp. 604–1361). See also H. Miyakawa/Zama and A. Kollautz, "Ein Dokument zum Fernhandel zwischen Byzanz und China zur Zeit Theophylakts," *BZ* 77 (1984), 6–19.

²*CI* IV.40.2. On the *comites commerciorum* (one for Oriens and Egypt, another for Illyricum and a third for Moesia and Pontos) see A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), II, 826 and III, 272 note 7.

³Lopez, "Silk," 10 ff. This legislation was not uniformly applied throughout the centuries, yet it remained valid in its essence. One has to wait until the end of the 9th century to find the first imperial decision tending partially to suppress these restrictions: Leo VI, in his Novella 80, authorized the free sale to private individuals of "pieces" of purple cloth: P. Noailles and A. Dain, *Les nouvelles de Léon VI le Sage* (Paris, 1944), 272–75.

killed business in Byzantium and resulted in the creation of an internal black market that had to be policed.⁴ But, in the meantime, a great breakthrough came about: in the reign of Justinian himself, and (according to the legend reported by Procopius) thanks to some Indian monks, the Byzantines learned how to produce silk—a Chinese secret up to then—and started growing their own silkworms.⁵ Byzantine silk production, which became one of the major elements of the economic force of the empire, took its first steps.

It is obvious that silk imports from the East did not stop—in fact, they never stopped completely. Thus it is not impossible to date in the reign of Justinian or one of his successors another law which shows a greater desire for the acquisition of oriental silk: a ceiling price of 15 nomismata for the sale of one pound of raw silk inside the empire is established, and purchases from the barbarians are authorized only for imperial officials and for no one else.⁶ These imperial officials are now called, in Greek, *kommerkiarioi* and seem to have approximately the same powers as the *comites*

commerciorum, with one difference: the latter had been officials working for the financial benefit of the state, while the new *kommerkiarioi* are state officials making profits for themselves as well as for the state. In the fifth-century law concerning the *comes commerciorum* it is clearly stated that if any private citizen bought silk directly from the barbarians, he would be punished by perpetual exile and by confiscation of his property;⁷ in the sixth-century law concerning the *kommerkiarioi* the same stipulations are repeated with the difference that here it is stated that the illegally acquired silk could go to the *kommerkiarios*⁸ rather than to the fisc which received the rest of the culprit's goods—a statement that clearly shows that the *kommerkiarios* was also carrying on his own private business and had to receive compensation for any lost profit, undoubtedly because he was granted a monopoly over silk imports.

What is a *kommerkiarios*? The term first appears around the year 500 during the reign of Emperor Anastasios (491–518): we hear of a former *kommerkiarios* who lived in Antioch and was appointed *comes Orientis*; and we learn that the *kommerkiarios* (without any geographical precision, as if the job was unique in the empire) was obliged to pay part of the salary of the *doux* of Mesopotamia.⁹ In the early seventh century we meet a *kommerkiarios* of Tyre who was unjustly accused of causing the goods of the *kommerkion* to become dilapidated.¹⁰ In all three cases we have important persons living in the East and disposing of money and goods belonging to the state. I do not think that these texts warrant the hypothesis that the *kommerkiarioi* were duty collectors (as they will

⁴Procopius, *Secret History*, 25 (ed. Haury, Teubner, III, 155 ff): Justinian authorized the sale of silk dresses (ἑσθητός) at a maximum price of eight gold coins a pound (τὴν λίτραν); silk, being particularly precious, was sold by weight even when made into cloth or garments, presumably with the possibility for increasing its price in order to take into consideration any extra work (such as embroideries, etc.). My interpretation of this passage differs from that proposed by various scholars, especially by Lopez, "Silk," 11, who considers the eight nomismata as a ceiling price for the acquisition of raw silk from foreign merchants, in spite of the fact that Procopius speaks of ἑσθητές sold in Constantinople and mentions the "tithes" (δεκατεντήρια) that had to be paid on this merchandise inside the empire (undoubtedly the new taxes of Abydos, instituted by Justinian and mentioned by Procopius in the previous pages).

⁵Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, IV, 17 (ed. Haury, II, 576–577).

⁶The law was first published from cod. Bodleianus 3399, fol. 58, by Zachariae in a footnote of his 'Ανέκδοτα; it was then republished by the same author with a long and masterly commentary in "Eine Verordnung Justinian's über den Seidenhandel aus den Jahren 540–547," *Mémoires de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St.-Petersbourg*, ser. 8, vol. 9, no. 6 (1865), rpr. in K. E. Zachariae von Lingenthal, *Kleine Schriften zur römischen und byzantinischen Recht*, I (Leipzig, 1973), 525–43. It is now included, as no. 154, in the collections of Justinian's Novellae (Imp. Iustiniani P.P.A., *Novellae*, ed. C. E. Zachariae von Lingenthal, II, Leipzig, 1881, 293; cf. *CIC* III, 798, no. 5). It was attributed to Justinian by Zachariae; to one of his successors by Lopez, "Silk," 13; again to Justinian by E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, I (Paris-Brussels-Amsterdam, 1949), 770 ff, 843–45. I do not think that a clear opinion can be expressed as to the date and attribution of this novella, and, in any case, the date does not make any difference as far as my argument is concerned. What seems to me very probable, though, is that the novella, which concerns raw silk at the frontier with a ceiling price of 15 nom., must be later than the measures of Justinian described by Procopius, which concern garments sold in Constantinople for a ceiling price of 8 nom. (cf. above, note 4).

⁷*CI* IV.63.6.

⁸The *kommerkiarios* "can" (δύναται) take the merchandise away from the merchant. Of course, it is not a question here of "selective punishment" as Lopez ("Silk," 13 note 2) understood it. The legislator makes it clear that while all property of the transgressor will be confiscated, according to preexisting law, the *kommerkiarios* "can"—but not necessarily "will"—claim the illegally imported silk (which otherwise would go to the state). One may suppose that the *kommerkiarios*, being a businessman himself, was not necessarily eager to claim part of the confiscated property of another businessman, a "colleague," the more so as the mandate of *kommerkiarios* was, we shall see, held on an annual basis.

⁹This particular treatment of the military commander of Mesopotamia has created a precedent, which survived till the 9th century; see the more recent publication on this subject by W. Brandes, "Überlegungen zur Vorgeschichte des Thema Mesopotamien," *BSI* 44/2 (1983), 171–77.

¹⁰All three texts are quoted and discussed by Hélène Antoniadis-Bibicou, *Recherches sur les douanes à Byzance* (Paris, 1963), 157 ff (hereafter Bibicou, *Douanes*), but her conclusions are different from mine. A fourth text, mentioned on p. 158 note 1, does not necessarily refer to a *kommerkiarios*.

become later); on the contrary, the mention of the “goods” of the kommerkion invites us to consider them as carrying on trade on behalf of the state. Now, if we remember that, as we have seen, they also seem to have had a personal stake in this business, we have to conclude that most probably already in the sixth century they farmed their office (that is, the exclusive right to buy silk from foreigners and sell it in the interior), out of the exercise of which they made profits and, consequently, were also liable to make payments for the account of the state, obviously from the part of the profits that went to the state.¹¹ What is important and has to be stressed here is that they are yet few in number: normally one person at a time, maybe two or three in case of business associations (see below), and only for limited periods of time (no lifelong appointments). The kommerkiarios of the early sixth century does not seem to have any functions other than those of the comes merciorum that preceded him.¹² One may thus wonder whether

¹¹ The novella *peri metaxes* says that the kommerkiarioi should “negotiate” (πραγματεύεσθαι) with the barbarians for the silk at 15 nom. a pound and “resell” it (μεταπωλεῖν) to the metaxarioi or to others “not for more” (οὐ πλέον). This phrase has been understood by some scholars (Stein, Bibicou) as indicating that the kommerkiarios was not allowed to make any profit from the operation since he had to sell silk at the price at which he bought it; and it has served them as an argument for supposing that he must have been collecting the import and circulation tax (which would have been his only revenue). But this hypothesis, not supported by the text (or by any other text of that period) presents the following contradiction: if the kommerkiarios added to the merchandise the circulation tax, its selling price would also be higher than its purchase price. I think that the text would be better understood if one stresses the “intended” distinction between negotiating and reselling, between πραγματεύεσθαι and μεταπωλεῖν. The kommerkiarios should negotiate with the idea that the price of raw silk should not be higher than 15 nom. a pound when he resold it to the Byzantine merchants. But no one says that the price he would pay to the Persians had to be that high: the lower the purchase price, the larger would be his margin of profit. Moreover, no one says that this purchase price was effectively paid in gold (the export of which was forbidden); the verb πραγματεύεσθαι might well be understood as hinting that the gold coins were an account money, serving as common denominator for establishing the value of the merchandise that changed hands. Consequently one may imagine a situation in which the kommerkiarios, having made a good bargain on the merchandise that he was exporting, might agree to exchange it for a “nominal” price of 15 nom., resell it for 15 nom., and still make a profit (the monetary economy is automatically established once the merchandise is inside the empire). This procedure also explains why a punishment is foreseen for the kommerkiarios only if he sells at a high price, not if he buys at such a price.

¹² This point of view, contested by Bibicou, *Douanes* (followed by J. Nesbitt, in *DOP* 31 [1977], 115 note 20), had been proposed by G. Millet, “Sur les sceaux des commerciaux byzantins,” *Mélanges G. Schlumberger*, II (Paris, 1924), 303–27 (hereafter Millet, “Commerciaires”). See also Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 296, 862, 869. The control of eastern trade in luxury

the term *kommerkiarios* is not simply a demotic Greek translation of the official Latin title—a translation that prevailed when the practice of farming out this office started to become general and its jurisdiction centered on the silk trade.

This textual information is poor. But we have another, very important source: the lead seals of kommerkiarioi, preserved in large numbers and constituting a special group, easy to recognize, because an approximate or even a precise date can be attributed to each one of them. This peculiarity has long attracted the attention of scholars, but a sound chronology of these seals was not proposed until 1972, together with the publication of large quantities of new material.¹³

items is still considered to belong to the kommerkiarios/telones in a 10th-century text (*Fontes minores* [Frankfurt, 1976], I, 90, cf. 87), which reproduces a passage of the *Digesta* (39.4.16.7).

A new theory concerning the meaning of the early kommerkiarioi (those who are associated with an apotheke) has been proposed by M. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy* (Cambridge, 1985), 624, 626–34, 654–62. Hendy made wide use of the new sigillographic materials (cf. below, note 13); accepted Nesbitt's understanding of the seals, that is, that the kommerkiarioi were duty collectors (with this I partly disagree) and were farming out their jobs (I very much agree); connected the apotheke with the Muslim institution known as *al-gaysariyya* and indicating a building “generally involving the production and sale of luxury goods” (I agree with this point, with some important nuances that will be discussed below); but related the kommerkiarioi of the apotheke with the army and represented them as “quartermasters general” selling weapons to soldiers at the time of mobilizations. On this last point I disagree because: (a) it is not supported by any text; (b) it is in contradiction with the fact that some kommerkiarioi exercise, sometimes simultaneously, the function of archon tou blattiou (cf. below, p. 50); (c) the argument presented, that the kommerkiarioi appear in provinces threatened by enemies—and thus likely to be mobilized—seems particularly weak since it is based on, at best, circumstantial evidence: in the 7th and 8th centuries all the provinces can be seen as somehow threatened; (d) on the contrary, we shall see below that the kommerkiarioi seem to flee the war zone (see note 77); (e) the argument based on the seals of the Slav *andrapoda* cannot hold because it is based on a forcibly twisted chronology of events, in spite of its being appropriately recorded by Theophanes (see below, 52 f).

¹³ The basis for any further research on seals of kommerkiarioi is provided by G. Zacos and A. Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, I/1 (Basel, 1972), 129–363 (chap. 2: “Dated Byzantine Seals”), and I/3, 1592–1596 (supplement) (hereafter Zacos-Veglery). A previous attempt at classifying these seals was made by N. Likhačev, “Datirovannye vizantijskie pečati,” *Izvestija Rossijskoj Akademii Istorii Materialnoj Kul'tury* 3 (1927), 123–224, some of whose attributions have been revised by other scholars in scattered publications. A list of the seals of kommerkiarioi published before 1963 is provided by Bibicou, *Douanes*, 225–38, but it needs now to be revised according to the conclusions of Zacos-Veglery. An important supplement to the above material—a supplement that confirms the solidity of the basic principles of chronology proposed by Zacos-Veglery—is provided by the publication of similar seals from the museum of Carthage: Cécile Morisson and W. Seibt, “Sceaux de commerciaux byzantins du VIIe siècle trouvés à Carthage,” *RN* 24 (1982), 222–40.

Most Byzantine officials possessed a *boulloterion*, that is, a kind of iron pincers, the working ends of which were inscribed; if one introduced between them a blank lead roundel and struck on top of one of them with a hammer, he produced his own lead seal, used to validate correspondence, to close letters, and for the many other minor uses of a seal that one may imagine. This is true of the emperor himself, practically the only person in the empire to have his own effigy depicted on his seal; it is true for all other officials, from top to bottom, even for private individuals who decorated their seals with crosses, monograms, religious representations (such as portraits of saints), secular representations (such as animals), and, of course, with inscriptions indicating their own names, titles, and offices. Lead sealing was flourishing by the sixth century and became even more popular in those that followed.

We know of seventh- and eighth-century seals of *kommerkiarioi* belonging to this general category; some of them come from known officials, some do not.¹⁴ It is obvious that these were the ones used for regular correspondence. But in the early period, from the sixth to the early ninth century, we have a different type of *kommerkiarios'* seal, which is exceptional from all points of view and was obviously intended for a use other than banal correspondence. What this use might have been is suggested by some of these seals that come from bales of merchandise, since on their reverse one can clearly see the imprint of burlap. Others, inscribed on both sides, could be used for closing sacks or boxes of merchandise, as well as for other purposes. These seals are preserved in considerable numbers.

Their main characteristic is that they have on the obverse the effigy of the emperor or emperors, depicted in a way very similar to that on imperial seals or coins. This similarity, undoubtedly due to the fact that these matrixes were, at least partly, carved by state coin-die engravers, allows us to identify the emperor depicted and attribute with certainty an approximate date to the seals; moreover, from 673/74 to 832/33 we find on them the indiction year (or years), which allows us to date them with precision.

¹⁴E.g., Zacos-Veglery, nos. 968, 1013, 1032, 1811, 1880, 2077A, 2182. The first four of these seals may have belonged to *kommerkiarioi* also known from dated seals (*ibid.*, pp. 145, 146, 151, 155; tables 1, 3, 7, 10). A better documented case is to be found in N. Oikonomides, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, D.C., 1986) (hereafter *Dated Seals*), nos. 19, 20.

The first question arises: what is the meaning of the representation of the emperor himself on these seals of *kommerkiarioi*? This feature, unique as far as seals of civil servants are concerned, has been attributed to the importance of these officials and their being appointed by the emperor.¹⁵ This last point has already been contested,¹⁶ and rightly so: all appointments to high administrative positions were made by the emperor to persons chosen by himself. Moreover, the argument about the importance of the office also seems weak: none of the *kommerkiarioi* known from these seals can be identified with any certainty with a known historical personage, while the seals of many well-known top officials of the empire belong to the common type and are never decorated with the imperial portrait.¹⁷ Another explanation should be sought here.

The image of the emperor appears on his own seal and, at least in the sixth century, on seals of institutions belonging to the sovereign, such as the imperial hospice;¹⁸ it also was depicted on the boundary markers of imperial properties.¹⁹ In these cases its presence is easy to explain as that of an "identification card," marking what comes from or belongs to the ruler. But there is another use, much more widespread, and more interesting for our purposes: the imperial portrait (sometimes replaced by the imperial monogram)²⁰ was used on gold, silver, and copper coins and was seen not only as an authorization for the coin to circulate but also as a guarantee of the metal's fineness.²¹ That this was the perception of the Byzantines can be seen from the fact that in the law stipulating that old gold coins could circulate together with the more recent ones, it is specified that they must bear the emperor's effigy (*βασιλέως τύπον*) and have the right weight: it was easy to check the weight; but

¹⁵Millet, "Commerciaires," 310.

¹⁶Bibicou, *Douanes*, 170.

¹⁷Take, for example, the 7th- and 8th-century seals of Byzantine exarchs of Ravenna, supreme commanders in Italy, exercising simultaneously the military and civil administration of the peninsula: e.g., V. Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du médailleur Vatican* (Vatican City, 1962), 99–105.

¹⁸Zacos-Veglery, no. 129.

¹⁹Under Emperor Tiberios, 578–82; Zepos, *Jus*, I (Athens, 1931), 20 = F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, I (Munich-Berlin, 1924), no. 67. The same idea reappears in the 13th century: F. Miklosich and J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca*, IV (Vienna, 1871), 162. Cf. also G. Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, II (Berne, 1984), 130–31.

²⁰P. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins* (London, 1982), 33.

²¹Since antiquity the fineness of the coin's metal was guaranteed by the image and the inscription struck on it by the state: R. Göbl, *Antike Numismatik*, I (Munich, 1978), 29, 48.

the quality of the metal was guaranteed only by the emperor's portrait.²² The same portrait, here too sometimes replaced by the imperial monogram, and accompanied by those of public servants, appears in the silver stamps used by the Byzantine state in the sixth and seventh centuries to guarantee the quality of the metal.²³

Silk was also a very precious item. We know not only that its price was high, but also that it was an item in which wealthy individuals might invest in order to speculate.²⁴ We also know that persons who borrowed silk were eventually required to pay interest.²⁵ After all, don't we know that silk was to become a major source of revenue for the Byzantine state?²⁶ Wasn't there any guarantee of its quality?

We have seen that the kommerkiarioi were dealing in silk and that some of their seals with the imperial effigy were undoubtedly used for bales of merchandise. I suggest that these seals served to guarantee the quality of that precious material and to declare that its sale was properly authorized, while a different, common type of seal was used for regular correspondence. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that all other public officials who had seals with the imperial effigy were also dealing in precious items: the sakellarioi of Africa, who were in charge of the mint of Carthage;²⁷ the archontes

of the blation, that is, the officials in Constantinople who held the monopoly on the production and sale of some dyes, especially purple ones, and of high-quality textiles colored with them (see below); an official of the late seventh century who took charge of a "giant sale" of slaves for the profit of the emperor (see Appendix 2); and some general logothetes (tax collectors) of the late seventh and early eighth centuries, who seem to have been assimilated to kommerkiarioi (see below, p. 46).

We may now return to the preserved seals of kommerkiarioi with this idea in mind. What do we find?

(a) They start appearing in the late sixth century; the earliest preserved one may have belonged to a certain Magnos the Syrian, an influential minister of Justin II (565–78), who was at the same time "curator," that is, "administrator," "trustee," of imperial estates (*oikos*). The extant seals belonged, according to their inscriptions, to "the imperial estate, [which is] under Magnos, gloriosissimus curator kommerkiarios of Theoupolis" (i.e., Antioch).²⁸ It is clear that we are at the beginnings of an institution; the functions of kommerkiarios seem to be attached to the administration of an imperial estate—or, rather, we have one person who has farmed out the exploitation of the estate as well as the functions of kommerkiarios.²⁹ In any case, the seat of this kommerkiarios is Antioch, a large city close to the eastern frontier with Persia and main outlet of the silk route from Central Asia.

(b) From this same region comes a series of other seals which mention the place name Tyre,³⁰ a well-known center of production of silk textiles (together with Beirut).³¹ Most of these seals date from the late sixth or very early seventh century, and in any case none of them can be placed after 638, when Tyre was definitely conquered by the Arabs—and, most probably, none is later than the conquest of Phoinike by the Persians in 613. Already in this early period one finds cases of two or three persons who have a common seal of kommerkiarioi, thus showing that they were business partners who had farmed out the office.

²⁸Zacos-Veglery, nos. 130–130 bis, and p. 215 (biographical and bibliographical information about Magnos). See also D. Feissel, "Magnus, Mégas et les curateurs des maisons divines de Justin II à Maurice," *TM* 9 (1985), 465–76; and *Dated Seals*, no. 5.

²⁹It must be noted that the expression *κουράτωρ κομμερχιάριος* (without *καί*) of the seals, if taken literally, is awkward: it leaves the impression that *κουράτωρ* may have been understood as a qualification of *κομμερχιάριος*, or vice versa.

³⁰List by Zacos-Veglery, 214.

³¹Cf., e.g., Procopius, *Anecdota*, 155.

²²Basilics 54.18.1. Reference to this law is also made by John Skylitzes, ed. Thurn, 275 (*χαρακτήρα βασιλεύως*), and John Zonaras, ed. Bonn, 507 (*βασιλικὸν ἐκτύπωμα*). It is interesting to note that the author of the Basilics, following the prescriptions of Novella 52 of Leo VI, who mentions the necessity of an "unchanged appearance" (*ἀπαραιοίητον τὴν μορφὴν*; P. Noailles and A. Dain, *Les nouvelles de Léon VI le Sage* [Paris, 1944], 198–201), reactivated here a law of Emperors Valentinian and Valens (364–75), reproduced in *CI* 11.11.1 ("Solidos veterum principum veneratione formatos"). The *βασιλικὸς χαράκτηρ* makes it impossible for one to refuse a coin: Book of the Eparch, 3, 3; 9, 5; 10, 4; 11, 9; 13, 2.

²³Erica Cruikshank Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps* (Washington, D.C., 1961), 5–6; cf. idem, "Byzantine Silver Stamps: Supplement I," *DOP* 18 (1964), 239–48; and "Supplement II," *DOP* 22 (1968), 143–49.

²⁴Book of the Eparch, 6, 10 and 7, 1.

²⁵Basilics 23.3.73.

²⁶One does not need to insist on the economic importance of Byzantine silk exports all over the world. See, among others, the recent study of H. W. Haussig, "Der Seidenhandel über die Chazaren mit Byzanz und Skandinavien," *Les pays du nord et Byzance* (Uppsala, 1981), 187–93.

²⁷The problem of the African sakellarioi has been raised and partially answered by Morrisson-Seibt, "Sceaux de commerciaux," 236–38. But no explanation has been proposed for the imperial effigy that appears on the African seals, while those of the same officials acting in Constantinople are covered with inscriptions only. Perhaps this could be related to the fact that in Africa they were acting as real lieutenants of the emperor, possibly after having farmed out their duties in the province, while in Constantinople they were acting as civil servants.

(c) The place names mentioned on these very early seals are those of big cities, Antioch and Tyre, both closely related to the importation of eastern silk. On one seal we even find a precocious mention of the *apotheke* (warehouse) of Tyre, which we may consider the point of concentration and redistribution of the imported silk. I shall return later to the term *apotheke*.

The conclusions drawn from the early seals are in absolute conformity with the information provided by the texts mentioned above: a limited number of officials, concentrated in the east, Antioch and Tyre (centers of silk trade), who farmed their profitable jobs from the state and had the use of a warehouse. As the novella *peri metaxes* declares, they imported silk and then sold it (undoubtedly with some profit for themselves and for the state) to the craftsmen, who worked it. Their seals, stuck on bales or used to close packages, were part of the selling process and served as a guarantee of quality and as an authorization for the merchandise to circulate. In the eyes of seventh-century Byzantines, a *kommerkiarios* was a person with authority over silk garments (ὁ τῆς σιρικῆς ἄρχων ἐσθῆτος).³²

Signs of change appear at the time of the great upheavals that characterize the early seventh century: while Syria and Phoinike are under Persian rule (613–27) an ἐνδοξότατος κομμερκιάριος named Theodore is mentioned among the five distinguished Constantinopolitans sent as envoys to the Avars in 626.³³ This is the first time that a *kommerkiarios* is attested at a distance from the silk route.

At the same time we find seals of *kommerkiarioi* without any geographic specification,³⁴ who seem to exercise some authority all over the empire, as far as Byzantine Africa, since many of their seals have been found in Carthage: a certain John, famosissimus (πανεύφημος), whose seals date from the early reign of Herakleios (between 615 and 629);³⁵ a certain Theodore gloriosissimus (ἐνδο-

ξότατος) from approximately the same period (616–29, 629–32), who could be identical with the gloriosissimus Theodore of 626 and who, in 641/42, will issue seals with the titles gloriosissimus kommerkiarios of Africa; a certain Sergios (629–41), who will also acquire the dignity of gloriosissimus (in 641); and some anonymous ones.³⁶ Of course there is no way of proving beyond any doubt that these officials were not just local Carthaginian ones; but such a hypothesis is not likely, since we have a seal, dated between 641 and 654 and coming from Constantinople, on which Sergios and Theodore are jointly holding the post of *kommerkiarioi* (without geographic precision).³⁷

But the vast majority of the seventh-century seals of *kommerkiarioi* also contain mention of one or more place names, names of provinces, sometimes names of cities. Their inscriptions usually occur in the following form: (a) name(s) and, eventually, honorific title(s) of the owner(s); (b) general *kommerkiarios* (or *kommerkiarioi*) of the warehouse (*apotheke*); (c) name of the city, of the province, or of several of them (up to five).

What is the warehouse (*apotheke*), which is always mentioned in the singular (even when two or more place names follow)? We have seen that it appears on a sixth-century seal of Tyre, and I interpreted it as a point of concentration and redistribution of imported silk. It appears also on some seals of the early seventh century and on all seals of *kommerkiarioi* that mention a place name and that date between 654/59 and 728/29. When we find the *apotheke* of a city (as occurs at times on early seals),³⁸ we may assume that it was a specific building in that city. But this is no longer the case when we have one *apotheke* of two or more cities (e.g., Koloneia and Kamacha³⁹ or Kerasous and Trapezous).⁴⁰ Moreover, the *apotheke* is very often defined by the name of one province or of many provinces, or of one or two provinces and one city

³² I am grateful to Mr. Bernard Flusin of I.R.H.T., Paris, for drawing my attention to the fact that George Pisides, who rewrote in 630 the Life of St. Anastasios Perses, used this expression in order to render in purist Greek the word κομμερκιάριος of his model. See A. Pertusi, "L'encomio di S. Anastasio martire persiano," *AB* 76 (1958), 54, 55; cf. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας, 4 (St. Petersburg, 1897), 140–41.

³³ Chronicon Paschale, Bonn ed., I, 721.

³⁴ Cf. J. Ebersolt, "Sceaux byzantins du Musée de Constantinople," *RN* 18 (1914), 229; Zacos-Veglery, nos. 134–135, 137–138, 145, 148, 185.

³⁵ Morrisson-Seibt, "Sceaux de commerciaires," 226–28, nos. 1–2; the authors suggest the likely identification of this person

with a John sakellarios, attested at about the same time. I wonder whether this same John, at a later date, would not have been the owner of the partly read seal mentioned (with bibliography) by Zacos-Veglery, 214, no. 6 (John endoxotatos apo hypaton, patrician, logothete . . .).

³⁶ Morrisson-Seibt, "Sceaux de commerciaires," 228–32. As far as Theodore is concerned, it should be added that he might have been identical with Theodore illustris and dioiketes, whose seal, incompletely read, has been dated "614 or later" (Zacos-Veglery, no. 131); Sergios could be identical with the owner of the seals of Zacos-Veglery, nos. 486, 2975. See also *Dated Seals*, nos. 8–13.

³⁷ Zacos-Veglery, no. 135.

³⁸ E.g., Zacos-Veglery, nos. 133(?), 150.

³⁹ Zacos-Veglery, nos. 203 (702/4), 217 (713/14).

⁴⁰ Zacos-Veglery, 181, table 29 (689/90 ff.).

(usually situated inside or close to the province),⁴¹ etc. The combinations are numerous, and sometimes surprising, in spite of the fact that all the above groupings are geographically coherent. For example, the two Cappadocias are usually mentioned together, as if they had a common warehouse; but in 691/92 the warehouse of Cappadocia I is mentioned separately, while Cappadocia II is coupled with neighboring Lykaonia.⁴² Another example: the province of Hellespontos had its own apotheke (presumably at Abydos); yet this province is coupled with Constantinople in 695/96 and with Asia in 721/22, both of which had their own well-attested warehouses.⁴³ One is thus brought to the conclusion that the word *apothēke*, initially a specific building, soon acquired a second, "abstract" meaning designating an administrative unit with authority over territories (not ports or routes) of varying extent, defined usually by the name(s) of province(s) but also by the name(s) of cities or described by more complicated expressions (e.g., Honorias, Paphlagonia, and the littoral of Pontos down to Trebizond).⁴⁴ Inside the region covered by an administrative apotheke there could be one or several "real" warehouses serving the primary purpose of that kind of building, concentration and redistribution, under the supervision of the kommerkiarios responsible for the operation—an operation that could be much better controlled with the introduction of the custom of dating the seals precisely by inscribing on them the indiction:⁴⁵ this supplementary information, which survived without exception well into the ninth century, appears in 673/74, coinciding with the beginnings of the first siege of Constantinople by the Arabs.⁴⁶ One may wonder if this innovation should be related to the desperate efforts of Constantine IV to create a sound economic basis for his empire in order to thwart the ambitions of the caliphs.

⁴¹ E.g., Koloneia, Kamacha, and Fourth Armenia; Lazike, Kerasous, Trapezous; Paphlagonia and Ionopolis; Isauria and Syllaion; Cilicia and Korykos; etc.

⁴² Zacos-Veglery, 178–79, table 26.

⁴³ Zacos-Veglery, 165–67, 170–72, 176–77, tables 17, 19, 21.

⁴⁴ Likhačev, "Datirovannye," 165–66, no. 3. Cf. Zacos-Veglery, no. 2765.

⁴⁵ Likhačev, "Datirovannye," 176–77, no. 6, published a seal of Julian apo hypaton and general kommerkiarios of Crete for ind. 2 and 3 (688–90?); above the indiction figures one sees the enigmatic abbreviation B-T, which Likhačev interpreted as τοπαρχης and Zacos-Veglery, 241, as βασιλικὸν or δευτερον and τέλος or τελώνιον, which makes more sense but is not justified paleographically. I am wondering whether this is not a geographic reference: (δευτερος) τόπος, indicating a second place of concentration for the merchandise. Cf. *Dated Seals*, no. 22.

⁴⁶ A. Stratos, "Siège ou blocus de Constantinople sous Constantin IV," *JÖB* 33 (1983), 89–107.

Independently of the credibility of the above hypothesis, it is clear that the introduction of indiction dating meant tighter controls for the kommerkiarioi. We have seen what kind of officials they were in the sixth century, and I have pointed to indications showing that, already at that time, they might have been farming their duties. This general image becomes much clearer in the seventh century, as John Nesbitt first pointed out,⁴⁷ especially from the moment that seals begin to be dated by year. These are the main indications.

1. The same person or persons hold simultaneously many geographically incompatible apothekei.⁴⁸ This is impossible for government appointees, while it is very understandable for those that farmed their duties, who could be represented in the provinces by their personnel; consequently one has to imagine them as wealthy individuals at the head of powerful economic organizations. From the extant seals we know of individuals holding simultaneously two or three apothekei, but we find cases of up to seven such concessions held simultaneously by one person or association of persons. There are good reasons to suspect that a similar situation prevailed also before the introduction of indiction dating: we have seven different seals in many copies, concerning different provinces, but all belonging to Stephen patrikios and dating between the years 659 and 668; we have three different seals of different provinces but all belonging to Theodore apo hypaton and dating between 668 and 672.⁴⁹ Although not absolutely certain, it is highly probable that some of these mandates were simultaneous, as will happen in later times.

2. Several kommerkiarioi mandates are held jointly by two (even three) individuals, who have common seals. This appears already with the sixth-century kommerkiarioi of Tyre. It is clear that these are cases of business associates, the more so since these associations seem to have a certain stability over the years: take, for example, the cases of George patrikios and Theophylaktos (689–709), Mikkinas and Gregory, Synetos and Nicetas (710–15), etc.⁵⁰ Stability but not exclusivity: during

⁴⁷ In a paper delivered in 1976 at the Second Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, Madison, Wisconsin; the essential parts of this paper have been published: J. Nesbitt, "Double Names on Byzantine Lead Seals," *DOP* 31 (1977), 115–17.

⁴⁸ See the list established by Zacos-Veglery, tables 4–6, 8–13, 16.

⁴⁹ Zacos-Veglery, 145–46, tables 1 and 3.

⁵⁰ Zacos-Veglery, 150, 156, tables 6/2, 11. For Mikkinas and Gregory, one should add Morrisson-Seibt, "Sceaux de commerciaires," 234–36, 240, no. 17 (apothēke of Africa); and *Dated Seals*, nos. 19–20.

the 4th indiction (690/91) George patrikios was holding the office of archon tou blattiou in association with Theophylaktos while he was kommerkiarios of two apothekai on his own.⁵¹ This situation also points to a kind of association based on free individualistic speculation and not to any kind of state appointment.

3. The mandates are normally for one year, most probably from the beginning, certainly from 673/74 onward—one more indication of yearly farming obtained by bidding at an auction. For a limited period, from 687 to 715, we have some seals with two consecutive indictions, which have been interpreted as those of civil servants who, having continued for a second year, added another figure on their boulloterion.⁵² This hypothesis should be abandoned because it presents major difficulties, technical (how could blank space for inscribing the “additional” indiction be provided if not from the beginning?) and archeological (the figure of the “additional” indiction is not any crisper than the “old” one). Another hypothesis, less unrealistic but also unconvincing, is that the boulloterion was made during the second consecutive mandate and that the first’s indiction was added for “historical” purposes.⁵³ On the contrary, the farming hypothesis fits well with the existing documentation: in cases of double indictions one has to assume that, for some reason, the highest bidder obtained a two-year mandate that he inscribed right away on his boulloterion; if, with time, this boulloterion was worn out or broken and needed to be replaced, the second boulloterion, if made after the end of the first year, could mention only the second of the two indictions, the one during which it was effectively used. And we have some examples of this procedure: George patrikios and Theophylaktos archontes tou blattiou for indictions 3 and 4 (689–91) and again for indiction 4 (690/91); the same individuals, general kommerkiarioi of Lazike, etc., for indictions 5 and 6 (691–93) and again for indiction 6 (692/93).⁵⁴

4. One assumes that as the mandates were for a

full indictional year, bidding for obtaining them would normally occur in the course of the previous year. And this most probably was the case. But there are some instances where it seems that mandates were secured after the beginning of the indiction: Kosmas, well-attested kommerkiarios of the years 679/80 to 690/91, had the honorific title of stratelates from indiction 8 to indiction 2 (679/80–688/89) and still has it on a seal of indiction 3 (689/90); but on two other seals of the same indiction 3 (689/90) he bears the higher title of apo hypaton, to which he has been promoted in the interim.⁵⁵ Similar remarks can be made for the kommerkiarios George (690/91–695/96), who started as scribon in indiction 4 (690/91), kept the same title on one seal of indiction 5 (691/92), and was then promoted to apo hypaton for the rest of his career, starting in that same indiction 5 (691/92), of which we have two seals.⁵⁶ These examples are eloquent. Now, if the auction did not necessarily take place before the beginning of the indictional year, for which the concession was obtained, one can assume that this concession did not concern customs duties but was related to a product depending on a yearly cycle. This is in fact the case of silk.

The farming of offices was a well-known practice in the later Roman Empire; the emperors forbade it repeatedly, thus showing that the practice never stopped: it should be noted here that they shared profits with tax farmers.⁵⁷ The main inconvenience of the system, pointed out in Justinian’s Novella 8,⁵⁸ is that the emperor thus deprived himself of the possibility of intervening and correcting injustices. We have here a very small number of very wealthy people, who do business with the state and in the name of the state; in order to increase their economic power—and their leverage upon the government—they create associations with each other. Most probably they also benefit from political support: is it mere chance if the seals of some of them—and of the very flourishing ones—disappear with a change of emperor? George patrikios and Theophylaktos, very active during the

⁵¹ Zacos-Veglery, 149–51, tables 6/1 and 6/2.

⁵² Millet, “Commerciaires,” 310; cf. Zacos-Veglery, 137.

⁵³ Zacos-Veglery, 280.

⁵⁴ Zacos-Veglery, nos. 165 and 167; 178 and 179. An uncertain case appears in table 36, p. 202: Thomas and John ergasteriarchai and archontes tou blattiou for ind. 1 (687/88); anonymous ergasteriarchai and archontes tou blattiou for ind. 1 and 2 (687–89) and, once again, anonymous for ind. 2 (688/89). One wonders if the last two anonymous seals are not a testimony of direct administration by the state, after Thomas and John had been dismissed. See below for a similar case.

⁵⁵ Zacos-Veglery, 147–48, table 4. The lone figure of the emperor represented on this seal excludes the hypothesis of attributing it to the previous indiction 3 (674/75), when three equal autocrats were in power.

⁵⁶ Zacos-Veglery, 152–54, table 8.

⁵⁷ Cf. R. Guiland, “Vénalité et favoritisme à Byzance,” *REB* 10 (1953), 35; cf. idem, *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines*, I (Berlin-Amsterdam, 1967), 71; and Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 571–72, 574, 576–77, 588. Cf. P. Veyne, “Clientèle et corruption au service de l’état: La vénalité des offices dans le Bas-Empire romain,” *Annales* 36/3 (1981), 339–60.

⁵⁸ *CIC* III, Nov. 75.

first reign of Justinian II (between 689 and 693), do not show up for twelve years, and they reappear in 705/6 and 708/9, during this same Justinian's second reign.⁵⁹ Constantine apo eparchon is attested only under Tiberios-Apsimaros.⁶⁰ The successful team of Synetos and Nicetas, well attested in indictions 9 to 13 (710–15),⁶¹ disappears from the business when a tax collector, Theodosios III, comes to power in Constantinople. But the most eloquent case is that of George apo hypaton, also scandalously active during the first reign of Justinian II: for indiction 8 (694/95) he had at least seven mandates; for indiction 9 (695/96) he obtained at least four more.⁶² But by the end of 695 Justinian II was overthrown by the Constantinopolitan populace because of his fiscal policies, and his two main financial ministers were lynched. The kommerkiarios George apo hypaton also disappears from the scene, for good. But what is impressive is that one of the apothekai that he had received in concession for indictions 8 and 9 (694–96), Asia, Caria, Lycia, etc., reappears on a seal of indictions 9 and 10 (695–97) without the name of a kommerkiarios and with the inscription ἀποθήκης τῶν βασιλικῶν κομμερκίων of Asia, Caria, Lycia. It looks as if the state, anonymously, had taken over directly the administration of the apotheke. The general atmosphere seems to be that of the cleansing of scandals; the more so, since two more ἀποθήκαι τῶν βασιλικῶν κομμερκίων without kommerkiarios appear on seals of that date, right after the downfall of Justinian II.⁶³

This idea of direct administration by the state seems to have been forgotten for some years. Regular kommerkiarioi/farmers reappear throughout the first third of the eighth century, including the first half of the reign of Leo III the Isaurian,⁶⁴ up to 728/29. Then a radical change occurred: from 730/31 onward the seals of apothekai and of provincial kommerkiarioi disappear altogether; they are replaced by seals that have the imperial portrait(s), are dated by one (and never two) indictions, and bear the impersonal inscription τῶν βασιλικῶν κομμερκίων, “of the imperial kommerkia,” followed by the names of the provinces or cities concerned.⁶⁵ None of these seals, which were

used for more than a century, has on its reverse any imprint of burlap: it would seem that the custom of sealing bales of merchandise disappeared during the first third of the eighth century.⁶⁶ It would also seem that from then on the practice of farming the kommerkia also disappeared, being replaced by direct and impersonal administration by the state. This change may reflect other more important structural reforms. But it must, in any case, be related to the new idealism—I could say, the new puritanism—introduced in Constantinople by the first Isaurian emperor, together with the militant nationalism that characterizes the period.⁶⁷ Isn't it this same Leo III who ordered the judges' salaries to be paid by the imperial treasury, in order to combat corruption?⁶⁸

During more than half a century, starting in 730/31, we find no more seals of kommerkiarioi on which the name of a province or city is mentioned. There remain only some seals, without geographic specification, of γενικοὶ κομμερκιᾶριοι who we may assume were based in Constantinople because they often add the title archontes tou blattiou.⁶⁹ The meaning of the title “general kommerkiarios” on these eighth-century seals is open to speculation, but it is undoubtedly a survival of pre-730 practices, probably due to the closeness of the service of the blattion. But this last service will disappear before the end of the eighth century (cf. below, Appendix 1). The title γενικὸς κομμερκιᾶριος also disappears, with the exception of only two seals of the early ninth century from Chaldia and Pontos.⁷⁰ From 832/33 dates also the last known seal of “imperial kommerkia” with imperial portraits. Then we have only three intermediate seals, which still display the number of the indiction: Adrianople of indiction 2, Thessalonica of indiction 4, and Sinope of Euxeinos Pontos of indiction 11, which I would prefer to place close to each other and as close as possible to 832/33. Sinope could date to 832/33, Adrianople to 838/39, and

⁵⁹Two late examples from 700/702 and 713/16: Zacos-Veglery, nos. 201, 216.

⁶⁷Hélène Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1975), 29 f.

⁶⁸Last paragraph of the prooimion of the Isaurian Ecloga: *Ecloga*, ed. L. Burgmann, *Forschungen zur byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte*, hrsg. v. D. Simon, Bd. 10 (Frankfurt, 1983), 166.

⁶⁹E.g., Zacos-Veglery, nos. 215, 267, 268, 272, 275, 1883, 2264, 2635A; cf. (gen.) kōmm. of the 8th century (often late 8th/early 9th century) not coupled with blattion, *ibid.*, nos. 968, 1811, 2100, 2182, 2364, 2502. For the blattion and its meaning see below, Appendix 1.

⁷⁰Zacos-Veglery, nos. 1880, 2077A.

⁵⁹Zacos-Veglery, 150–51, table 6/2.

⁶⁰Zacos-Veglery, 155, table 10.

⁶¹Zacos-Veglery, 156–57, table 11.

⁶²Zacos-Veglery, 152–54, table 8.

⁶³List in Zacos-Veglery, 190, table 33.

⁶⁴Cf. Zacos-Veglery, 155–61, tables 8–16.

⁶⁵List in Zacos-Veglery, 192–97, table 34.

Thessalonica to 840/41⁷¹—all three under the reign of Emperor Theophilos, who might thus be considered as the initiator of this gradual simplification of the *kommerkiarioi* seals.

If the sixth- and early seventh-century *kommerkiarioi* were concentrated at the end of the silk route, this was because silk imports were essential for maintaining an adequate supply of luxury garments in the empire: domestic production was still too new and could not meet the demand—even in the tenth century Byzantium will continue importing silkware from the Arabs, in spite of its own full-blown production. But the seventh century was also the period during which Byzantine silk production grew and became one of the pillars of the empire's state economy. And I think that the seals of *kommerkiarioi* are related to and evidence of this growth. In spite of the fact that they can be accurately dated, I will examine them in large groups because I would like to give a certain statistical basis to my conclusions. I will divide the seals into three groups, defined by external characteristics: (a) seals of *kommerkiarioi* without the indiction (down to 672); (b) seals of *kommerkiarioi* with the indiction (673/74–728/29); and (c) seals of the “imperial *kommerkia*” (730/31–end).

Silk production requires essentially the eggs of silkworms, a carefully prepared environment, quantities of high-quality mulberry leaves for feeding the larvae, and an abundant labor force available once a year, in the spring, when the silkworms grow and need to be fed and tended. After the harvest and after having set aside cocoons for reproduction, the reeling of the remaining ones is also a time-consuming operation requiring skill. Mulberry trees grow in all moderate climates and on all kinds of land, except for very humid areas: theoretically they could be grown throughout the territory of the Byzantine Empire, but they have always been scattered, mentioned usually at the edge of fields or close to villages, without any attested attempt to create mulberry plantations. As the silk caterpillars are extremely voracious (during their feeding period, they consume about twenty times their own weight in mulberry leaves daily) and as they reproduce very quickly, an ade-

quate provision of leaves was the main difficulty limiting the otherwise vast possibilities of production.⁷²

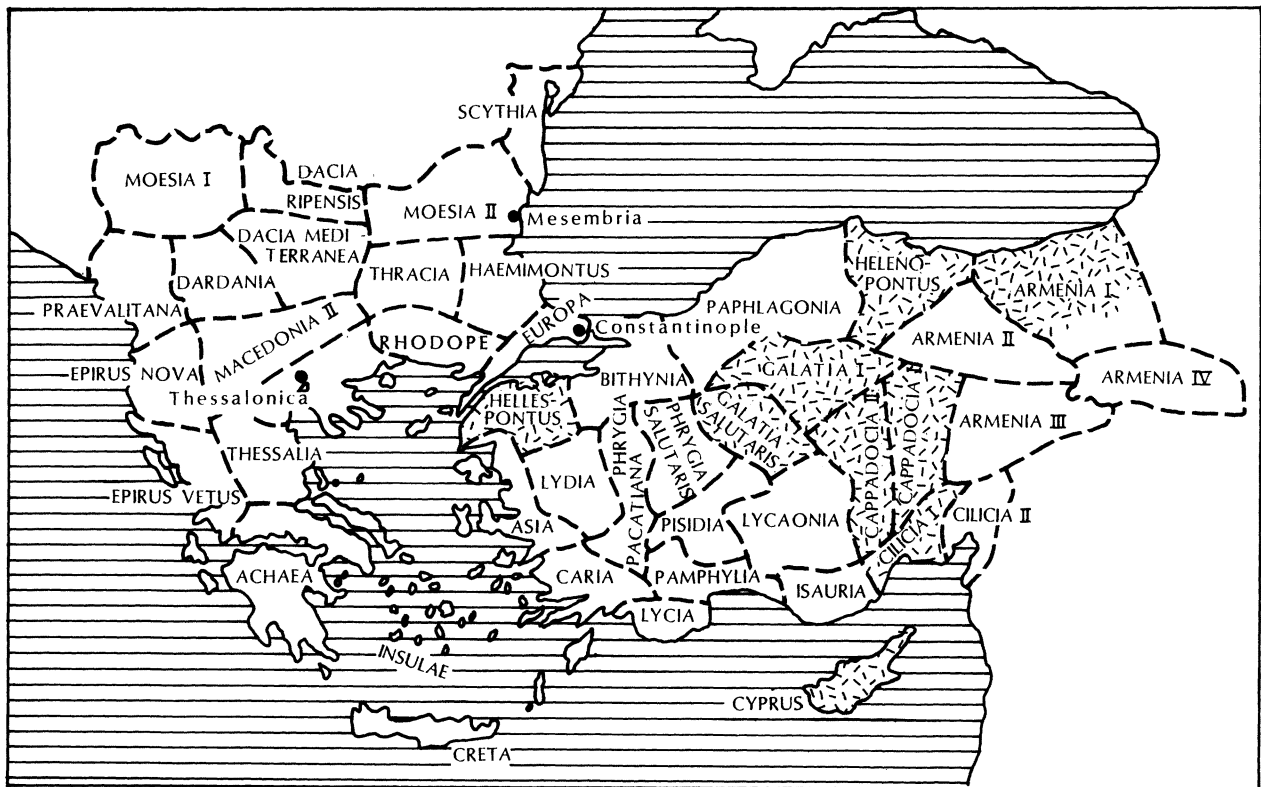
The Byzantine state was faced with the problem of creating this new industry. It is probable that the first attempts were made in Syria and Phoinike, where specialized workers of imported silk were concentrated in the sixth century (Tyre and Beirut). But there were opportunities for increasing the production elsewhere in Byzantium. And, more important, with the Arab onslaught the empire definitely lost these regions in 638. Byzantine silk production and the silk industry had to move toward the northwest. I suppose that this was the main mission of the *kommerkiarioi*, as attested by their seals bearing the imperial effigy. Is it a coincidence that these seals appear precisely when the Byzantines started producing their own silk?

As a hypothesis, I have proposed considering these seals as guaranteeing the quality, and eventually the quantity, of packages of silk and declaring that proper authorization was given for its sale to specialized workers, who would transform it into thread, dye it, weave it, embroider it, and so on. In an initial stage the *kommerkiarios*—as the old comes *commerciorum*—was an intermediary, buying imported silk and selling it to the workers (*μεταξάριοι*). His *raison d'être* was to make sure that silk was not imported at any price and, in fact, to lower the prices asked by the Persian merchants. He had a warehouse for storing his merchandise safely. It is probable that, when the domestic production of silk began, he was also the only person authorized to buy from the producers, keep the product in this same warehouse, and resell it to the silk workers after having guaranteed its quality.

One may suppose that a similar system continued to be applied when Syria and Phoinike were lost to the Persians (613–27) and, for good, to the Arabs (638 ff), with the officials called “general *kommerkiarioi*” without geographic indication residing in Constantinople and exercising authority in most of the empire (including Byzantine Africa). I have already described the seals of these officials and mentioned the very few texts that speak of them. Then starts a series of seals of many provincial *kommerkiarioi*: the earliest one appears in Cyprus (629–31), which is, so to speak, the natural prolongation of the silk route of the main-

⁷¹ Zacos-Veglery, nos. 1406, 2103 and 2894 (suggested dates for Thessalonica, 810/11 or 825/26; for Adrianople, 838/39(?); for Sinope, 832/33 or 847/48. Cf. also the introductory remarks of Zacos-Veglery, 136–40, concerning the appearance and the end of indiction dating, the latter being subtly connected with the appearance in the sources of the word *kommerkion* “in the sense of indirect taxes on the sale and circulation of merchandise.”

⁷² Technical information and bibliographic references on silkworms and silk production can be found in any encyclopedia, for example, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.



1. Provinces mentioned on seals of kommerkiarioi (629–72)

land; then we find seals of kommerkiarioi of Africa, practically for as long as this province remained Byzantine (641/42, 642/47, 673/74); then comes the turn of Asia Minor: seals dating between the years 654 and 672 mention both Galatias, both Cappadocias, Helenopontos, Cilicia I, and two cities, Abydos (which corresponds to the province of Hellespontus) and Sebastopolis (of Armenia I).⁷³ Our documentation, although fragmentary (in all, we know of about three hundred dated seals of kommerkiarioi between the mid-sixth and the mid-ninth centuries), shows that the Byzantine kommerkiarioi of the provinces start appearing close to the places where silk traditionally originated. See Map 1.

Thus texts and seals of that period point toward the silk trade. The geographic limitations of the kommerkiarioi could indicate the limits of the market in which they were authorized to sell. But this cannot be their only meaning: many recent studies have shown that provincial cities declined sharply during the early seventh century; vast ur-

ban centers of late antiquity, such as Sardis or Ephesus, were replaced by nearby "fortified villages," which kept their ancient names. It is hard to imagine that this "ruralized" milieu would have prospective buyers of luxury items in numbers justifying the creation of monopolies.

What seems to me more likely is that the kommerkiarioi were mainly related to silk production—and its promotion—inside "their" provinces. I *imagine* them as wealthy businessmen at the head of important organizations—or, at least, having a number of employees—who had the "seed" and know-how, approached peasants who had mulberry trees and manpower, eventually lent them some money at the beginning, and bought their crop at the end. As they had acquired the exclusive rights for the province at a state auction, they were in a good position to keep the prices down. These "exclusive rights" seem to be of capital importance for the whole procedure because they would make the kommerkiarioi sole possible buyers of silk even for peasants who had their own "seed" and know-how. The yearly product, raw or partly finished, would be concentrated in the *apotheke*—one or more warehouses—controlled, classified accord-

⁷³Zacos-Veglery, 145, 146, 198, 222 (tables 1, 3, 35); Morrisson-Seibt, "Sceaux de commerciaux," 231, 233, 234.

ing to quality, certified with the seals. Then it would be ready for marketing, wherever there was demand for it, first of all in Constantinople, where the industry was concentrated, including the imperial ergasterion (workshop) and blation, the direction of which was often held (that is, farmed out) by the same persons who farmed the kommerkiarioi positions (cf. below, Appendix 1).

It is obvious that these operations could be extremely profitable for those who headed them; they could also be very profitable for the state treasury. But the effects of free competition among the bidders were mitigated when these created associations, "trusts." Political patronage and corruption could also play an important role in the process, as we have already seen. At certain times a wealthy kommerkiarios or association of kommerkiarioi appear to have such extended concessions that they appear quasi monopolistic.

The system seems to have functioned well enough to succeed in propagating silk production over most of the imperial territory. Seals dated with indictions between 673/74 and 728/29 show that during this fifty-five-year period kommerkiarioi appear throughout Byzantine Asia Minor, the islands of the Aigaion, and the southern part of the Balkans. Of course this does not necessarily mean that they were successful everywhere. Some provinces appear on many seals, while others appear very seldom: for example, Asia appears on nine seals, from 689/90 to 755/56, but Lykaonia appears on only two (689/91 and 691/93).⁷⁴ The names of themes start appearing as geographic indications in the last twenty years of the seventh century with Armeniakon and Hellas.⁷⁵ This shows in fact that we have individuals ready to take charge of entire themes encompassing many provinces. But here again one must stress the fragmentary character of our documentation as well as the fact that seals are preserved at random and that, as far as statistics are concerned, our basis is weak. Yet, in spite of the fragility of any conclusions drawn on this basis, I have represented in Map 2 what the published seals inform us about the expansion of the kommerkiarioi. I have distinguished between provinces mentioned once or twice, three or four times, and five to nine times. The result is rather significant: silk production seems to have expanded in various degrees in all Asia Minor, with the exception, maybe due to

sheer chance, of Galatia I, that is, the region of Ankara. Its strongest concentrations are to be sought, expectedly, along the densely inhabited and fertile littoral and in the two Cappadocias, also known to have been fertile and densely populated during late antiquity.

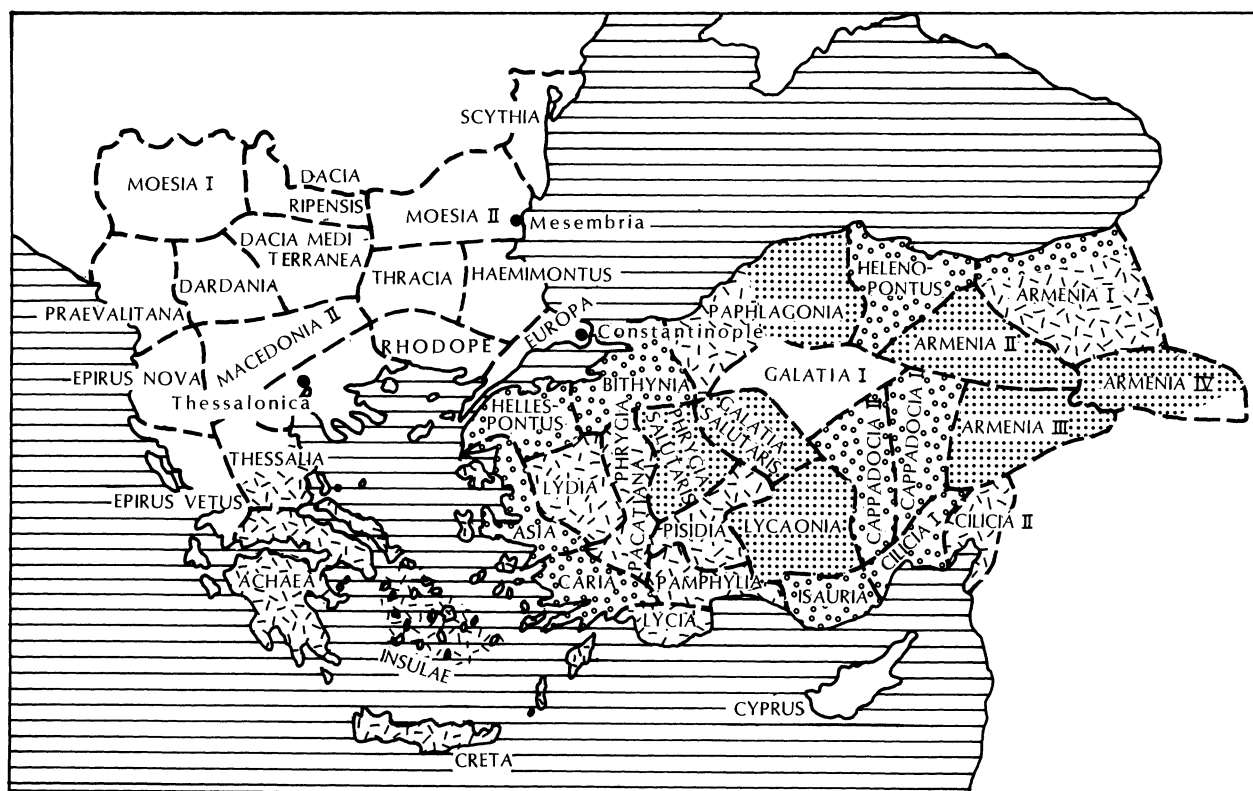
Then comes the reform of Leo III; the impersonal "imperial kommerkia," which I presume are run directly by the state, replace the kommerkiarioi. At the same time the names of the Roman provinces start being replaced more and more often by those of the Byzantine themes. During a first period, from 730/31 to 755/56, both systems are used concurrently. After 755/56 the names of the provinces disappear. At the same time the geographic distribution of "imperial kommerkia" becomes dramatically limited, essentially to three cities (Constantinople, Thessalonica, Mesembria) and to one theme (Thrace),⁷⁶ and this until the first decades of the ninth century. On Map 3 one finds the provinces with "imperial kommerkia" attested between 730/31 and 755/56; on Map 4 one finds the themes with "imperial kommerkia" attested between 730/31 and 755/56 and the cities and the theme that have imperial kommerkia throughout the period from 730/31 to the twenties of the ninth century. What appears very clearly is the gradual shrinking of what I call "the silk-producing area" and its moving westward. This is undoubtedly related to the well-known Arab wars.

In 674–78 the Arabs besieged or blockaded Constantinople for the first time; they did it mainly by sea, thus leaving most of Byzantine Asia Minor practically untouched. Their crushing defeat in 678 obliged them to conclude a humiliating treaty with the emperor, and peace prevailed for three decades. But then the Islamic onslaught started again: in 691/92 they occupied Armenia; in 709 they reached Tyana; in 710/11 they were still limited to the eastern outskirts, but occupied fortresses in Cilicia. Then they started to invade Asia Minor. In 717 Arab armies crossed all of Asia Minor and started their second unsuccessful siege of Constantinople. Then, from 726 onward, Arab-Byzantine clashes, invasions, and counterinvasions became a permanent feature of life in the East.

⁷⁶The theme of Thrace, created in 679/80, had its western part transformed into a separate theme called Macedonia (with Adrianople as its capital). This seems to have taken place between 789 and 802. The kommerkia of Thrace and Macedonia are mentioned on a seal of 820/21; an imperial kommerkiarios of Thrace and Macedonia appears on a seal of 831/32; cf. Zacos-Veglery, no. 282, and *Dated Seals*, no. 46.

⁷⁴Zacos-Veglery, 166, 192, 196 (tables 19, 34); nos. 166, 177.

⁷⁵Zacos-Veglery, 164, 174–75 (tables 18/2, 24).



2. Provinces mentioned on seals of kommerkiarioi (673/74–728/29) once or twice (*dots*), three or four times (*rods*), five to nine times (*circles*)

The Arabs came again to Kaisareia and besieged Nikaia. Although the Byzantine victory of Akroinon (740) confirmed the emperor's control over most of the peninsula, and Constantine V's campaigns in Syria and Armenia boosted the prestige and morale of the empire, nevertheless Arab invasions remained possible—and in fact occurred—all over the southern border region. Asia Minor, vigorously defended, was nonetheless a permanent battlefield, especially in its eastern part. Under these conditions growing silkworms was no longer possible—and might have looked almost preposterous. So Byzantine silk production gradually retreated to the Balkans where repeated peace treaties with the Bulgars, as well as some successful wars against them, guaranteed the necessary peaceful environment.

These maps and the evolution that they show confirm, I think, my hypothesis about the nature of the office of *kommerkiarios*—and of the imperial *kommerkion*. They show that these functions cannot be related to war or to provisioning the army, since the offices “flee” the war zone.⁷⁷ They cannot yet be related to duty collection, because

they are not related to ports or major routes; because they are concerned with yearly harvests; and, above all, because there are no texts prior to the ninth century relating them to any kind of duty collection.

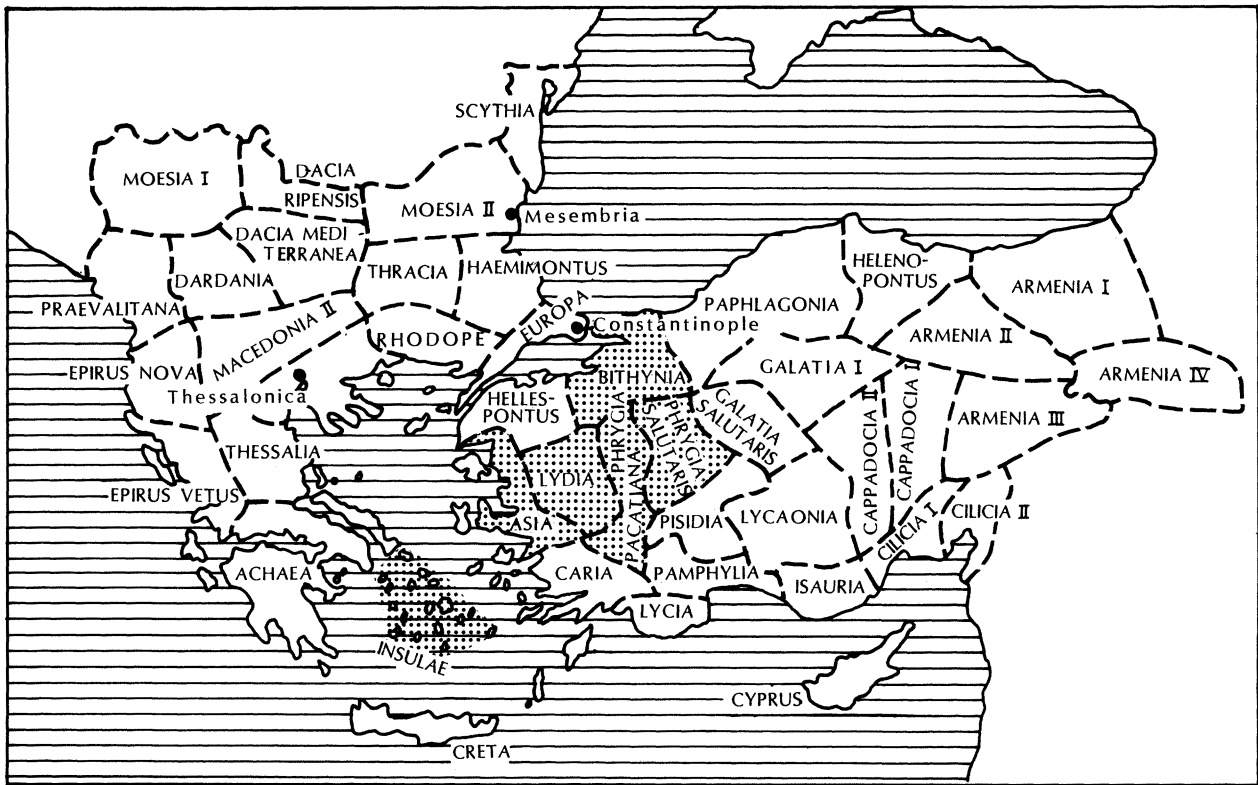
Yet it seems that at some rare times tax collecting may have been a side occupation for *kommerkarioi* or an occupation exercised over territories that corresponded to those of an *apotheke*. This can be seen thanks to the title of *logothete* or general *logothete* as well as to terms like *dioiketes* or *dioikesis* on seals of the category we are interested in. In the early Byzantine centuries *logothete* meant tax collector.⁷⁸ The tax collector was also the *dioiketes*.⁷⁹ Now these titles appear on some early seals,⁸⁰ a seal dated between 659 and 668 belonged

⁷⁷This is, in my view, a fundamental argument against the theory of M. Hendy (cf. above, note 12).

⁷⁸ R. Guillard, "Les logothètes," *REB* 29 (1971), 5–126; cf. V. Laurent, *Le Corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1981), II, 129.

⁷⁹N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles* (Paris, 1972), 313 and note 150.

⁸⁰Zacos-Veglery, 214.



3. Provinces mentioned on seals of imperial kommerkia (730/31–755/56)

to a kommerkiarios who was at the same time stratotikos logothete, that is, involved in paying the salaries of the army.⁸¹ But these are quite exceptional cases. Later such phenomena become more frequent: (a) in 696/97, in 702/4, and in 715/16(?) we find seals with the imperial effigy that belonged to γενικοί λογοθέται of apothekai (Phrygia Pacatiana and Lydia, Sicily, Koloneia and Kamacha, Lazike, Constantinople);⁸² (b) from 725/26 to 728/29 we have a series of seals that belonged to γενικοί λογοθέται and kommerkiarioi of several apothekai in the northwest of Asia Minor, Constantinople, Thessalonica, and Mesembria.⁸³ I think that case (b), more explicit, clarifies case (a): in both cases we have individuals who have farmed simultaneously the kommerkion and the direct taxation within the borders of an "apotheke," which thus appears as an entity of administrative and fiscal geography, a kind of "province": we shall see (below, Appendix 2) that these same circumscriptions were used in

694/95 in order to define the region in which an individual was entitled to sell slaves. But on the other hand we shall later (736/37) find a seal with the inscription "imperial kommerkia of the *dioikesis* of Andros";⁸⁴ here the limits of the fiscal *dioikesis* were used to define those of the kommerkion. It seems that little by little the gap between silk trade and tax collection was growing narrower, undoubtedly because both were exercised by the same persons, business and tax farmers at the beginning, civil servants later.

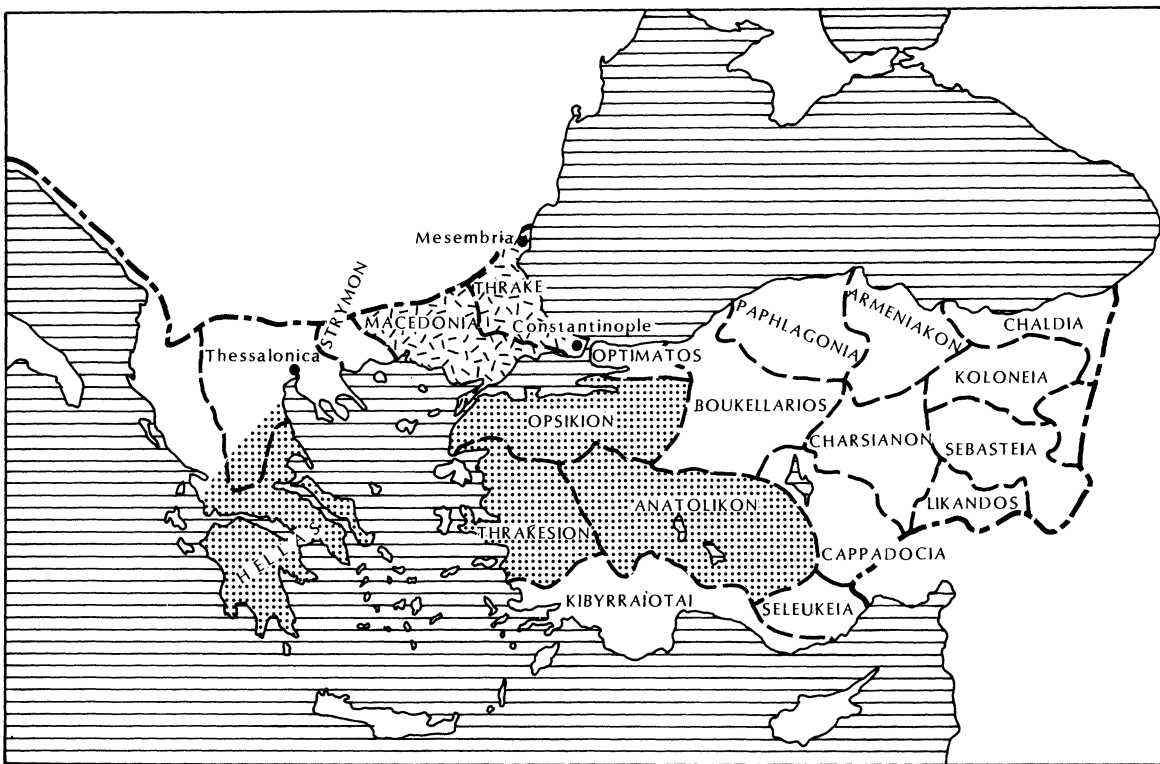
A further question that needs to be answered, even if incompletely, is whether these kommerkiarioi were trading in merchandise other than silk. The cautious answer is that there is no text informing us that they did so; and that in the unique case of 694/95 when slave trade was engaged in by a person who was at the same time kommerkiarios (below, Appendix 2), this person had a different seal made for this second activity—which, consequently, was not normally included in his mandate

⁸¹ Zacos-Veglery, no. 144; cf. Guiland, "Logothètes," 25–26.

⁸² Zacos-Veglery, nos. 195, 197, 203, 204, 220.

⁸³ Zacos-Veglery, nos. 232–237. cf. table 20, pp. 164–65.

⁸⁴ Millet, "Commerciaires," 315; Likhačev, "Datirovannye," 200–201. Cf. Zacos-Veglery, 193.



4. Themes mentioned on seals of imperial kommerkia between 730/31 and 755/56 (dots) and up to the early ninth century (rods)

as kommerkiarios. Thus in a free economy, as the Byzantine one, I would tend to define the prerogatives of a kommerkiarios as being monopolistic only so far as trade in raw silk was concerned, but not excluding, by any means, other commercial activities.

Particularities appear in the cases of kommerkiarioi whose jurisdiction is constantly defined by the name of a city. In addition to the kommerkiarios of Abydos, who could well extend his jurisdiction over all of the province of Hellespontos (cf. p. 39), there are three of them, all of whom appear during, or shortly after, the reigns of Justinian II (685–95, 705–11). This may well be sheer coincidence; yet it should be noted because of the impressive record of this emperor as a reformer, especially because of his dynamic, imaginative, and far-reaching—albeit contested—monetary, financial, and fiscal policies.⁸⁵ These general kommerkiarioi are the following:

(a) Constantinople, attested uninterruptedly

⁸⁵ Cf. Constance Head, *Justinian II of Byzantium* (Milwaukee, 1972).

from 688/89 to 727/28.⁸⁶ It is probable that after Leo III's reform an office of "imperial kommerkia" of the city was created,⁸⁷ but its life was short; a "genikos kommerkiarios," residing in Constantinople (because he often adds the title archon tou blattiou), is attested continuously throughout the eighth century.⁸⁸

(b) Mesembria, attested uninterruptedly from 690/91 to the joint reign of Constantine V and Leo IV (751–75).⁸⁹

(c) Thessalonica, attested for the first time in 712/13.⁹⁰

The main common characteristics of the last two cities in the seventh and eighth centuries is that both are close to the frontier and both are ports that could serve as outlets for the trade of vast hinterlands, inhabited by economically underdeveloped peoples, the Bulgars and the Southern Slavs. Their cases will be examined in detail elsewhere.

⁸⁶ List in Zacos-Veglery, 120–22 (table 21).

⁸⁷ Zacos-Veglery, no. 257 (reading incomplete).

⁸⁸ List in Zacos-Veglery, 203–5. Cf. also above.

⁸⁹ List in Zacos-Veglery, 182–84.

⁹⁰ List in Zacos-Veglery, 185–87.

For the time being, it suffices to say that since the merchants coming from the north of the Balkans represented primary economies, it is most likely that barter was the main type of exchange taking place there, even if calculations were done by using the Byzantine gold coin as money of account.⁹¹ Consequently the *kommerkiarioi* were obliged to trade back to Byzantium all kinds of merchandise that they received in exchange for what they exported. These cities would thus appear as trading outposts, where exchanges between private merchants of the two countries were being supervised: this was the frontier between a barter economy and a monetary one. It is obvious that in such places and under such conditions the potential for profit making was very high.

It is possible that the third known *kommerkarios* of a city, that of Constantinople, was also dealing with foreign trade coming directly to the Byzantine capital. This is a hypothesis not contradicted by any text that I know—but not supported by any either. Consequently for the time being it cannot lead us any further.

The explanations above raise one more question: why didn't similar institutions appear on the eastern frontier? A first answer would be that there is no reason for presuming that whatever institutions prevail in the western part of the empire should prevail everywhere. We know, for example, that in the early tenth century the strategoi of the western themes were remunerated by collecting *sportulae* (συνήθειαι) locally, while those of the East received their salaries directly from the emperor.⁹² But I think that there could also be an explanation for the absence of *kommerkiarioi* in the East. Arab merchants came from an economy at least as developed and monetarized as that of the Byzantines; and the Arabs had their own silk production, part of which was exported and sold in the market of Constantinople, while the Arabs also imported high-quality Byzantine silk and other textiles. The state could supervise the exchanges—barter or monetary—between merchants of the two sides without needing to intervene and act as a merchant itself, either through a farmer/*kommerkarios* or directly by its officials of the “imperial *kommerkia*.”

I have mentioned above that with time some *kommerkiarioi* began to take an interest in collecting taxes. Then around the year 800 a new tax on

merchandise, called the *kommerkion*, appears for the first time in the sources. It is a sales tax collected on (certain) items sold in markets or fairs and is also called *πρατίκιον*. It appears also as a circulation tax of 10 percent *ad valorem* collected on merchandise imported to or exported from Byzantine territory; inside the empire a *kommerkion* (of how much?) is collected on merchandise reaching or leaving Constantinople through the straits by boat. The exact nature of this tax has intrigued scholars, who interpreted it one way or the other, or in a third way combining circulation and sales tax. It is not my intention to enter this discussion, which is a continuation of the quarrels concerning the *octava*, the circulation and sales tax of early Byzantine times (attested at least until 634).⁹³ What is important to stress for our purposes is that, in spite of the absolute lexicographic resemblance, the collection of the *kommerkion* is *not necessarily* the job of the *kommerkiarioi*.

At about the time when the “*kommerkion*” tax appears, important changes can be detected in the institution of the “imperial *kommerkia*.”

(a) The imperial effigy disappears from the seals: a seal of Debeltos of 832/33 is the last one to bear the emperor's portrait.⁹⁴

(b) The indiction dating also disappears in the reign of Theophilos, during which we find some “intermediate” seals with the indiction but without the imperial effigy.

According to the basic hypothesis that I have suggested in this paper, these phenomena would indicate that in the meantime the activities of the “imperial *kommerkia*” had changed in such a way that their seals were no longer related to the marketing of raw silk.

(c) The impersonal “imperial *kommerkia*” also disappear from the seals; the last attested one is that of Debeltos of 832/33.

(d) The *kommerkiarioi* reappear, sometimes as “general *kommerkiarioi*” but usually as “imperial” *kommerkiarioi*. The first dated mention of this title, which is a novelty, appears in 831/32 on the seal of Constantine, imperial *kommerkarios* of Thrace and Macedonia (with a portrait of Emperor Theophilos; indiction 10: *Dated Seals*, no. 46).

(e) The geographic extent of their jurisdiction is defined sometimes with the name of one or two,

⁹¹ The question has been discussed by Bibicou, *Douanes*, 246–55 (bibliographical references).

⁹² *De Cerimoniis*, Bonn ed., 696–697.

⁹³ The complicated problems of indirect taxation in Byzantium have been gallantly reexamined by Bibicou, *Douanes* (with analysis and evaluation of previous publications).

⁹⁴ Zacos-Veglery, no. 285.

even three, themes but more and more often by the name of a city, always a port, sometimes a river harbor. It is clear that the new functions are related to maritime trade, mainly with foreign countries. This is a function of the kommerkiarioi of cities that was known in the eighth century and became generalized in the ninth. It may provide the explanation for the metamorphosis of a silk tradesman into a customs official.

Being completely deprived of texts concerning these changes, we are limited to speculation. A likely scenario would be the following: having the monopoly over trade of expensive items with foreigners, the frontier-city kommerkiarios had the right to control the merchandise imported or exported by other tradesmen; for reasons of expediency he also started collecting the import or export duty; this duty was called the *kommerkion*, not only because it affected commerce but also because it was collected, in the eighth century, at the "imperial *kommerkia*." Then, at a moment unknown to us but which must have been close to the year 800, the "imperial *kommerkia*" ceased to control domestic silk production and to exercise trade in precious materials for the profit of the state (cf., however, note 12): the imperial effigy and the indiction year on the seals became obsolete and gradually disappeared. The relatively major state enterprises that were the imperial *kommerkia* also disappeared and were replaced by one civil servant, the imperial kommerkiarios, who had kept the rest of his prerogatives: customs controls and collection of the duty called the *kommerkion*. Tax collection being his most striking activity in the eyes of law-abiding Byzantines, he was assimilated to a *praktor*. I repeat that the above scenario is a product of imagination.

Be that as it may, it is certain that the ninth- and tenth-century kommerkiarioi were completely divorced from silk trade and production. The Book of the Eparch (chaps. VI, VII) describes how things were done in the very early tenth century (in fact, these must have been practices already established in the ninth century): raw silk (or cocoons?) was brought to Constantinople by people from the country (*ἐξωτικοί*); the text does not specify whether they were producers or intermediaries, obviously because they could be both. But they could not be *μεταξοπράται*, that is, silk merchants, because these were not allowed to make purchases directly in the provinces. When the time for sale came, the silk merchants contributed to a common fund, according to each merchant's

wishes, and a list was made (*ἀπογραφή*, VII.2). This was a wholesale operation, not accessible to the poor members of the guild. The silk was bought (without being burdened by the sales tax, *πρατίκιον*) and was distributed to the merchants in proportion to what they had contributed to the fund. From then on these merchants were allowed to sell (still by weight) to their colleagues, with a reasonable profit, but they were not allowed to sell directly to other persons or to serve as intermediaries in order to buy for the sake of others. Consequently there is no longer a monopoly over silk production in one province or another, a monopoly that belonged to the state and could be farmed out by a private person. In the tenth century silk production seems to function according to the principles of a free economy with the fundamental difference that there was only one group of possible buyers, the *μεταξοπράται* of Constantinople, if one wanted his cocoons to be transformed into silk and silk textiles. Buyers and sellers met in Constantinople as two cartels and negotiated the sale, presumably according to the principles of supply and demand, and so on. It is obvious that with time domestic silk production had reached acceptable levels, did not need to be stimulated, and that the state had made the choice of insisting on quality rather than quantity for its limited and protected production.

The passage from one system to the other may be related to the evolution of Byzantine guilds and, in particular, to the creation of new ones in Constantinople related to the silk trade. We know these guilds thanks to the Book of the Eparch which dates from the tenth century. We can say that most of them are the continuation of the late Roman ones. But those related to silk constitute a special case: we meet, for example, the *πρανδιοπράται*, specializing in textiles imported from Syria; it is obvious that this trade had been invented after the fall of Syria to the Arabs (638)—we do not know how long after. More or less at the same time, the silk trade must have moved also to the capital.

In the sixth and early seventh centuries the kommerkiarioi imported silk which they sold to the *μεταξάριοι*, who were private dealers—and craftsmen—of silk and who were concentrated in Tyre and Beirut. One assumes that when these cities fell to the Arabs the system was transplanted to Constantinople, with the difference that now (seventh/eighth century) the kommerkiarioi were dealing mainly in home-produced silk which they

could sell to private μεταξάριοι. I set aside here the imperial factories because these were undoubtedly subject to special treatment and possibly had private sources of silk. When, under Leo III, the state took direct control over silk production, the situation remained essentially the same, with the difference that now imperial factories had absolute priority in selecting what they needed from the year's crop. But in the meantime the Constantinopolitan guilds were developing, including the μεταξοπράται, the new dealers in raw silk, who were now concentrated on one street and who obtained the authorization to act as a cartel. After this the role of the state as monopolistic—and paternalistic—intermediary between the producers and the Constantinopolitan merchants lost its meaning. The imperial kommerkia disappear; they are replaced by the “new style” kommerkiarioi, who keep only part of their traditional prerogatives: control of imports and exports and collection of customs duties. The state's direct involvement in foreign trade also disappeared, leaving the field free to private initiative and private enterprise. Although controlled and held back by the state, the principles of a free economy based on the dialectical relation between supply and demand were gaining ground in Constantinople, at the expense of the traditional state controls and of the privileged few, who in the seventh and eighth centuries were able to monopolize them.

“Byzance, paradis du monopole et du privilège”? The case of the silk trade and industry, studied here, shows that state interventionism was declining in the ninth and tenth centuries, to the profit of the tradesmen and craftsmen of Constantinople. What used to be a state monopoly, accessible to a few privileged individuals, was now becoming the privilege of a whole group of professionals, whose activities, motivated by profit, were regulated and protected by the state. The trend, although moderate, appears to be toward capitalism and the development of a dynamic bourgeois class. Wouldn't these changes be the early signs of the flourishing Byzantine urban economies of the eleventh century?

APPENDIX 1

The Blatton

An important group of seals decorated with the imperial portrait are those of officials connected

with the Constantinopolitan office of the blatton.⁹⁵ The earliest preserved one dates from the reign of Herakleios between 632 and 641 and cannot be read with any certainty.⁹⁶ Large numbers of them are extant for the period between 687/88 and 785/86; the office of ἄρχων (or ἄρχοντες) τοῦ βλαττίου sometimes appears alone, but usually it is coupled with other titles: ἐργαστηριάρχης (687/88–720/29), γενικὸς κομμερκιάριος (713/14[?] and continuously from 749/50 to 785/86), and once with χρυσοσηπτής (730/31). To this group also belongs the unique seal of an ἐπάνω τοῦ ἐργοδοσίου with the imperial portrait from the year 697/98.⁹⁷ This group of seals presents characteristics similar to those of the kommerkiarioi: they are dated, sometimes with two indictions; they are sometimes issued in the names of two people, who must be seen as business partners who farmed these duties; and, for some of these officials, we can say with various degrees of certainty that they had at the same time a “common” seal, without the imperial portrait, which they presumably used for their regular correspondence.⁹⁸ In other words, they are seals coming from officials or farmer-officials quite comparable to the kommerkiarioi.

⁹⁵ Zacos-Veglery, 202–5 (table 36); cf. Laurent, *Corpus*, II, nos. 637–650, 658.

⁹⁶ N. Likhačev, *Istoričeskoe značenie italogrečeskoj ikonopisi izobraženija Bogomateri* (St. Petersburg, 1911), App., table 4, no. 15, cf. p. 72, fig. 143; republished by Laurent, *Corpus*, II, no. 637, with the suggestion to complete as σὺν τῷ ἐκκ[ε]κτο(ι) τῶν βλαττίων, which is ἀ¹hapax; κουράτορι τῶν βλαττίων would seem to me more likely, but even so, a sizable part of the inscription remains unread. The date can be established thanks to the obverse of the seal; the person standing to the right of the central Virgin has a long moustache, like that of Herakleios on his late coins (Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, pl. 16, nos. 275–277); the person to the left of the Virgin wears a crown with pendilia, which indicates that this is an empress, depicted in a way similar to that of Martina on Herakleios' seals (e.g., Morrisson-Seibt, “Sceaux de commerciaires,” nos. 1, 2, 11, etc.). The two small figures at the edges must thus be the emperor's sons, coemperor Herakleios-Constantine and Heraklonas (caesar in 632; augustus from 638). We have here the same five standing figures that appear *en buste* on seals of kommerkiarioi (including kommerkiarioi of Tyre, who cannot have existed after the capture of the city by the Arabs in 638: Zacos-Veglery, no. 131; Likhačev, loc. cit., 72, figs. 145, 146). Thus the above seal of the blatton must have been made after Heraklonas' elevation to the rank of caesar (632) and before Herakleios' death (641).

⁹⁷ Laurent, *Corpus*, II, no. 638, and especially Zacos-Veglery, no. 198.

⁹⁸ See, for example, two seals with inscribed invocalional monograms (obv.) and linear inscription (rev.) that belonged to Nicetas and to Ambros, both of the 8th century and with the titles archon of the blatton and general kommerkiarios (published by Zacos-Veglery, nos. 2264 and 2635A; other similar seals: nos. 1862, 1883). It is probable that Nicetas is identical with the archon of 711/12; and it is almost certain that Ambros is the archon who held the office around the year 775: cf. Zacos-Veglery, 205 (table 36).

The seals with imperial portraits described above are related to the imperial workshops for the production of silkware of high quality: these were the ἐργοδόσια, which are still attested in the tenth century. The word βλαπτόν initially meant purple dye and purple-dyed silk cloth,⁹⁹ which since the time of Justinian had become a state monopoly.¹⁰⁰ That the production of these materials was strictly controlled for their quality as well as for their circulation is a well-known fact. Imperial silk products were on top of the list of the *kekōlymena*, that is, merchandise whose export was prohibited: the well-known story of Liutprand of Cremona constitutes a vivid illustration of the procedure.¹⁰¹ And I suggest that the seals with the imperial portraits were used above all as a guarantee of the quality of the finished product. This desire for strict controls also explains the use of the indiction for providing the precise date of production (eventually used in order to attribute responsibilities).¹⁰²

The disappearance of the dated seals of the archontes tou blattiou at the end of the eighth century may be related to reforms that followed the destruction by fire of the ergodosia in 792 and their rebuilding by Empress Irene and Constantine VI between 792 and 797.¹⁰³ One may suppose that from then on the control elements were woven into the material itself, as can be seen in the Byzantine textile of Aix-la-Chapelle, seat of the Carolingian court:¹⁰⁴ a woven inscription gives the name of the Byzantine "minister" of the treasury responsible for those activities (the epi tou eidikou), the name of the "archon" of (the new ergodiosion) of Zeuxippou,¹⁰⁵ and the indiction in which the cloth was produced—that is, approxi-

mately the same elements that previously appeared on the seals. One assumes that these measures were later relaxed. Yet still in the tenth century we find the textiles of Siegburg (921–31) and Cologne (976–1025)¹⁰⁶ with woven inscriptions mentioning the names of the reigning emperors: here the names of the sovereigns seem to have replaced their effigies as guarantees of quality.¹⁰⁷ But this novelty did not last long.¹⁰⁸

APPENDIX 2

A Giant Sale of Slaves in 694/95

The seal mentioning the Slavs of Bithynia as *andrapoda* was first published by B. Pančenko in 1902¹⁰⁹ and has provoked several discussions since that time. G. Ostrogorsky correctly dated the seal to 694/95¹¹⁰ and considered it as having belonged to the administrator of the Slavs that Justinian II had forcefully settled in Bithynia as soldiers. Other seals of *andrapoda* from Asia Minor that had been published in the meantime did not attract much

¹⁰⁶ Lopez, "Silk," pls. ivb, v.

¹⁰⁷ Among the precious items enumerated in the brebion of the monastery of Stroumitza (*IRAIK* 6 [1900], 123) mention is made of a silk textile decorated with a picture of [John I] Tzimiskes (ἐν τῷ μέσῳ ἔχουσα ἱστορίαν τοῦ Τζιμισκῆ). But this could very well be a simple decoration.

¹⁰⁸ It has been argued that the cruciform monogram of [Emperor] Herakleios (610–41) appears on a Byzantine textile preserved in Liège (Lopez, "Silk," pl. iv). This seems to me doubtful, because the reading is uncertain (instead of the supposed K, I read IC) and because there is nothing showing that this is an imperial monogram; consequently it could just as well be the monogram of the craftsman who made it or of the patron who ordered it.

A related problem is posed by some silk textiles bearing names in woven inscriptions: one group is inscribed Ἰωσήφ, the other, rightly associated with the first one, Ζαχαρίου. There is disagreement concerning their date: 6th/7th century? The most recent publication on this topic is by Alisa Baginski and Amely Tidhar, "A Dated Silk Fragment from Avdat (Eboda)," *IEJ* 28 (1978), 113–15 (with bibliographical references). Or 8th century? Cf. Dorothy Shepherd, "A Coptic Silk," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 34 (1947), 216, 237. As the names seem to be written out in the genitive case (this is certain in the Zacharias group), they cannot be, as has been suggested, an indication of piety toward St. Joseph or St. Zacharias. I would rather understand these inscriptions as indicating the workshop from which the textiles came—in other words, the inscriptions would be "signatures" guaranteeing their quality in order to enhance the marketing of these products. Similar practices are attested since late Roman times: cf. R. Lequiénet, "Étiquettes de plomb sur des amphores d'Afrique," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Antiquité* 87 (1975), 667–80.

¹⁰⁹ B. Pančenko, "Pamjatnik Slavjan v Vifnii," *IRAIK* 8 (1902), 15–62.

¹¹⁰ Ostrogorsky, *History*, 117 (with literature).

⁹⁹ Ph. Koukoules, *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμός*, II/2 (Athens, 1948), 39. Purple has always been a very expensive item. Cf. St. Mrozek, "Le prix de la pourpre en histoire romaine," *Les dévaluations à Rome*, Colloque de l'École Française de Rome 37 (Rome, 1980), 235–42.

¹⁰⁰ Lopez, "Silk," 7, 12, etc. It must be noted, though, that Procopius, *Anecdota* (Teubner), 157, speaks of a monopoly of dyes (βαφῆς . . . βάμματος) that made prices soar.

¹⁰¹ *Liudprandi relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana*, 53–55: MGH, SS, III, ed. G. H. Pertz (Hannover, 1839), 359–60.

¹⁰² From that same 10th century comes the seal of Senachirim, archon tou chrysoklavou, that is, of the imperial embroidery workshop, which bears the date indiction 4 (Laurent, *Corpus*, II, no. 661) but no imperial effigy. It seems to be close to—and a survival of—the category of intermediate seals already mentioned for the 9th-century kommerkiarioi.

¹⁰³ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, 469; *Scriptores originum constantinopolitanarum*, II, ed. Preger (Leipzig, 1907), 269.

¹⁰⁴ Lopez, "Silk," pl. viii.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Oikonomides, *Listes de préséance*, 316–18.

to make the seals fit with Ostrogorsky's interpretation, it has been necessary to turn to the word's original meaning, "prisoner of war,"¹¹⁶ in spite of the fact that this original meaning had been forgotten long before the end of the seventh century.

Let us return to the deeds of Justinian II and of the Slavs, as they are reported in the Chronicle of Theophanes. In the year 688/89 the emperor campaigned against the Slavs and the Bulgars and forced his way to Thessalonica; "he took great numbers of Slavs, partly as prisoners of war, partly because they submitted to him (τὰ μὲν πολέμῳ, τὰ δὲ προσρύντα), made them cross at Abydos and settled them in the Opsikion."¹¹⁷ This transfer must have happened in 688/89 or the following year 689/90, that is, four or five years before the carving of the seal of George apo hypaton. It is hard to imagine that the name *andrapoda*, if it meant "prisoners of war," survived by five years the settlement of these Slavs and their enrollment in the imperial army.

Moreover, the same Chronicle of Theophanes tells us that in order to fight the Arabs in 691/92 Justinian raised among these newly settled Slavs an army of thirty thousand (the figure is probably exaggerated but all the same indicative of the numerical importance of the transplanted population); he called them "the Chosen People" (λαὸν περιούσιον) and appointed as their chief one of their own by the name of Neboulos. It is clear that here we have an army that the emperor considered an élite, tried to flatter, and somehow trusted, since he appointed a Slav to head it. There is no mention of *andrapoda* or of George apo hypaton. But things turned sour in the war: the Arabs managed to bribe Neboulos, who went over to their side together with twenty thousand Slavs thus provoking the defeat of the Byzantines at Sebastopolis in Armenia. The emperor, enraged at the defeat, took revenge upon the Slavs that were left behind (τὸ τούτων ἐγκατάλειμμα), together with their women and children. At the steep cliffs of Leukates, in the gulf of Nikomedeia (i.e., in Bithynia), he had them killed—or uprooted:¹¹⁸ the historian uses here the

word ἀνεῖλεν, the common meaning of which is "killed" but which can also mean "uprooted." It is possible that some executions or massacres of Slavs may have occurred in order to quell the emperor's thirst for revenge; but of course one cannot believe that a whole population of thousands had been exterminated while they were at the emperor's mercy and could be used in a more productive—and profitable—way: be sold as slaves.

The Byzantine defeat of Sebastopolis occurred in summer 692. The emperor's revenge may have taken place in 693 and 694. Before the beginning of the eighth indiction, that is, before 1 September 694 George apo hypaton had a seal carved, on which he mentioned the Slav slaves of the province of Bithynia. It is too much of a coincidence not to link the two facts closely: George was in charge of selling the Bithynian Slavs on behalf of the state (who was their owner, since they had been "confiscated" by imperial order). This was a big operation since it must have involved several thousand individuals. One underpopulated province (since it needed new settlers) could not by any means absorb them all. So George was granted the concession to exercise this same trade in several other provinces. One may even suppose that, at least for once, these concessions were granted to the individuals who already had farmed the *kommerkion* of those provinces¹¹⁹—and, consequently, that the network in place for the sale of silk and other precious materials may have been used, at least partly,¹²⁰ for this mammoth sale of slaves, organized on behalf of the Byzantine emperor, in the year 694/95. This procedure also explains why the imperial portrait appears on the seals of those who operated the business: it guaranteed that the sale was properly authorized; probably, the seals were placed at the bottom of the deed of sale accompanying each slave, if not directly on his chains.

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¹¹⁶Zacos-Veglery, 266.

¹¹⁷Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. De Boor, I, 364; cf. Ostrogorsky, *History*, 116–17; and Martha Gregoriou-Ioannidou, 'Η ἐκστρατεία τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ Β' κατὰ τῶν Βουλγάρων καὶ Σλάβων (688), *Βυζαντινά* 2 (1982), 111–24.

¹¹⁸Theophanes, *Chronographia*, I, 366; cf. Ostrogorsky, *History*, 118. The transplanted Slavs were settled by the Arabs in Syria, a detail that might indicate that these soldiers followed the army together with (at least some of) their families (other-

wise one may have to assume that all twenty thousand of them were definitely fed up with their family lives and that they deliberately abandoned their women and children in the hands of the emperor whom they betrayed—but this is highly unlikely).

¹¹⁹Or: the businessmen who had the capital and the contacts necessary to farm the job of *kommerkarioi* rushed, bidden, and obtained this new means of quickly enriching themselves even more.

¹²⁰It has to be noted, though, that the enumeration of the provinces is not exactly the same on the slave seals and on the *kommerkarios* seals of George; this would indicate that bidding for the slave business was done independently from bidding for an apotheka of *kommerkarios*.